



Misuse of 911 Panel Discussion

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Types of misuse

Misuse of 911 comes in a variety of forms, each handled in their own way based individual state or local capabilities and policies.

Intentional

- *Swatting Incidents – a form of harassment. A caller generates a call to emergency services reporting a false incident activating a law enforcement response to target a victim. Most often these types of incidents occur on non-emergency lines but can occur on the emergency lines. These types of incidents are becoming more frequent.*
 - [Charlotte SWAT team pranked with “swatting” call \(mysuncoast.com\)](http://mysuncoast.com)
- *Telephony Denial of Service Attacks – Overloading the phone system with a large number of calls where true emergency calls cannot either make it through the system to the 911 center or whereas call takers are unable to answer the large volume of calls coming into the system.*
- *Ransomware Attacks - malicious software designed to block access to a computer/phone system until money is paid.*

Types of misuse

- **Calls to intentionally make a false report**
- **Calls to intentionally harass the either the 911 center personnel or road units.**
 - **These can sometimes be sovereign citizens who don't feel the laws apply to them**
 - **Callers are sometimes vulgar and demeaning to anyone they speak with**
 - **Occasionally these individuals are under the influence of drugs or alcohol**
- **Unintentional**
 - **Uninformed users of the system.**
 - **Differing understandings of what an emergency is. It may mean different things to diff people.**
 - **Intellectual capabilities and no understanding of how to use the system or the device they are using.**
 - **Telemarketers calling 10-digit numbers associated with the 911 trunks**
 - **Accidental and abandoned calls. There are high numbers of accidental dials. Also referred to as pocket or butt dials)**

Misuse of designated administrative lines

- Misuse of the non-emergency lines can be just as problematic and can be more difficult to address.
- These lines are often used to transfer emergency calls to other locations.
- Mutual aid resources for major incidents are used.
- Lines are used as default routes for some carriers.
- As these lines are compromised and can have an effect on emergency response.

Abandoned Calls (Common misuse)

- Abandoned calls in Florida result in an average of 10% of the call volume. National Statistics are unknown.
- Why a call was abandoned is not always know. (*pocket dials, realized they dialed the wrong number, decided not to make the call*)
- Accidental/abandoned calls can often take up valuable resources as PSAP Personnel have to ensure that an emergency does not actually exist before being able to dismiss it.
 - Polices across agencies may vary.
 - In some areas, if a call is abandoned, the caller cannot be reached, and location information is provided. A law enforcement response will be sent.
- PSAP Staffing is a national problem and finding ways to reduce the amount of call volume to the 911 system is critical.
 - There are some centers that are running seriously understaffed.

Dealing with a variety of unknowns

- What is important to note for the United States is that we are a federation of states, and each state has the autonomy to create many of their own laws. There are less than 50% of the states that have misuse of 911.
 - While many of those states that do have laws against the misuse of 911 are similar, they may have different sanctions. Repeat offenders may have increased sanctions.

Varying practices

- PSAPS in other areas of the country may accept some types of calls on 911 whereas others may not.
- Calls not seen as an emergency, may be directed to a non-emergency number in order to allow access for valid emergency calls.
- Often the same person answering both emergency and non-emergency calls

Classification & Quality Control Efforts

- Many of these terms for misuse of the 911 system are commonly understood but are not necessarily classified the same universally across the country.
- Incidents of misuse will vary across the country as it is large and with vary diverse populations.
- Information reporting systems may be used to determine the severity of misuse and those issues dealt with locally.
- Computer aided dispatch systems may be used for tracking purposes.
- Some states may have reporting requirements while others do not.

Tools

- Implementing the necessary technological tools to prevent misuse may be dependent upon the type of systems we use for routing and receiving our 911 calls.
 - 911 systems are at variety of stages of either E911 or NG911 technology throughout the US.
 - Types of mitigation tools used may be determined based on systems capabilities.
 - Some mitigating actions such as call blocking may be available in a NG911 environment.
 - Identification of “bad actors” may also be detected in a NG911 environment

Tools

- Automatic abandoned call back (AAC) features on phone answering equipment is used in some areas to assist with the large volumes of abandoned calls.
- Some PSAPs have adopted technology provided in their call handling solutions called automated abandoned callback to address some of these accidental calls allowing the call takers to answer valid emergency calls. (Instead of the call taker making the call back and attempting to reach the caller, a computer server performs this task.)
- May not be ideal to ensure that an emergency call does not exist, we technology can be an alternative to staffing issues in the PSAP and being able to handle the number of calls.

Policies and protocols (Strategies)

- Each PSAP is responsible for creating their own set of policies on how to handle the variety of different misuse cases.
 - NENA and other standards setting bodies can help in guiding PSAPS as they create their own local policies.
- Individual state laws may guide some of the policy creation in the individual states.
- Others use neighboring agency policies and either duplicate or create some similar policies to fit their needs.

Standards used to develop local policies

- The process of creating even the industry standards is important. NENA uses a variety of individuals in their standards development that gives a diverse understanding of the topics and how to deal with them. We encourage participation by all members of the industry to include those with technical and operational experiences that can only enhance the product.
- Lessons learned round table discussions are often held at state level conferences or regional and statewide meetings.
- Sharing that knowledge is critical to mitigating these situations in other parts of our states or throughout the country.

NENA Standards

- NENA provides basic standards and information documents to assist PSAPS in making informed decisions regardless of their locality within the country.
 - NENA Telephony Denial of Service (TDOS) Info Doc NENA-INF-045.1-2022
 - NENA Call Blocking Info Doc NENA-INF-023.1.1-2020
 - NENA Spoofing Mitigation Information Doc NENA-INF-043.2-2022
- A full suite of NENA Standards and Information Documents can be located at [NENA.org](https://www.nena.org)

Strategies

- One of the most effective tools and strategies – Education
- Educating the public and often starts with children at a very early age in the schools. We participate in community outreach events, websites, and social media to deliver educational content on the proper uses of 911, not only for children but also adults.
- 911 was first introduced in 1968 and has been evolving since that time. We have engrained in our citizens the importance of 911 and for years have been educating on the proper use of 911.
- Ramifications for misuse are also publicized as the situations occur.
- NENA also offers resources to assist PSAPs in their public education efforts.

Training for PSAP Personnel

- **Variety of training resources are used to educate PSAP personnel. There is no one specific format used nationally.**
 - **We utilize national and state conferences to educate PSAP personnel.**
 - **Some states have education/certification requirements and a curriculum to follow.**
 - **Public Safety Organizations hold regular webinar opportunities.**
 - **Round table discussions and open forums are often used to educational.**

Information and reports

- Individual states may require some type of reporting but there is no federal requirement and therefore no empirical data exists on a national basis
- I live in the state of Florida and currently there is no requirement to report on the number of misuse cases occur in each PSAP.
- There is however a recent requirement that was enacted to report on PSAP disruptions. This would include incidents where the emergency system is overcome due to a telephony denial of service.

Administrative,
civil, monetary,
and penal
sanctions

- Individual states may or may not have enacted laws pertaining to misuse of the 911 system.
(We are a federation of states, and each state has its own autonomy to create many of their own laws)
- When doing my research, I found that that less than half the states have laws related to the misuse of 911.
- Many of the laws are similar making general misuse minor arrestable offenses. Repeat offenders may received increased

Laws

- Individual states may or may not have enacted laws pertaining to misuse of the 911 system.
(We are a federation of states, and each state has its own autonomy to create many of their own laws)
- Appears that less than half the states have laws related to the misuse of 911.
- Some states may have reporting requirements outlined in legislation. (Florida is one of those states.)
 - 2021 – Requirement to report on Cyber Disruptions and PSAP disruptions but general misuse data is not collected and reported on.